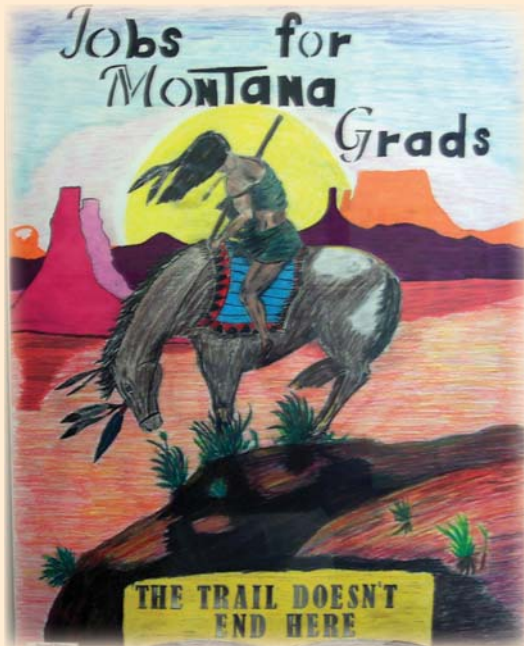


INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION

Author: Michelle Robinson

“A real eye-opener for me (in JMG)” was when I completed a mock-interview in front of my peers,” recalled Ernie Flynn. “I had absolutely no interview skills whatsoever. It dawned on me that I certainly didn’t get my after school job based on my interviewing abilities. It was more like they needed a warm body to wash dishes.”



Designed by Jhameil Moore, Havre High

Flynn, an enrolled Assiniboin Sioux of Fort Peck, was a senior when he first became introduced to the Jobs for Montana’s Graduates (JMG) program while attending the Project for Alternative Learning (PAL) in Helena. “I was a bit of a free spirit. Transferring to PAL from Capital High gave me more of what I needed. PAL offered a buffet of classes for us to pick and choose that fit more of my learning style.” However, when the school said he should consider taking the JMG program, he reluctantly agreed to join. “There were 14 of us in my class and we were all thinking, who is this ‘outsider’ coming in to teach us job skills,” he said.

“In retrospect, it was one of the best decisions I made. I always knew I wanted to go to college, I just didn’t know for what or how I was going to do it.” Armed with a BS degree in Rehabilitation and Related Services from Montana State University Billings (1996), he embarked upon a career as a youth counselor for emotionally disturbed kids. “I worked part-time, because my wife Wendy and I had just had our baby boy. We were sharing parental responsibilities. I carried odd hours to make sure she had time to pursue her career as well. That is when I saw an opportunity to work with Crown Bolt (a Southern California fastener company that supplies hardware to Home Depot throughout the

nation). I interviewed, got the job and have been with them for nearly nine years.” Today, as Senior Merchandiser, Flynn finds himself hitting the road about 80% of the time to check in on the six Home Depot stores that Crown Bolt services.

Jesse James Courville, a Confederated Salish-Kootenai tribal member and 2005 JMG graduate of St. Ignatius (Flathead reservation) originally dropped out in his junior year. “I wanted to be a Marine, but didn’t qualify due to the mistakes I made in my life. I lived in such a small town, everyone knew of my ‘failure’. I had to get out, isolate myself from everyone who cared for me. I made plans to go to another school in another town, but my habits had something else in mind and it certainly wasn’t school,” said Courville.

“I had no job. I lived in a smoky, alcoholic haze for months, sleeping in friends’ basements and sometimes not eating. I needed to graduate from high school,” he said. After making a series of bad choices, Courville made a life-changing decision to go back to school. With the help of his JMG Specialist, Jesse joined the JMG class and got his life on track. His new choices included attending the Career Development Conference and taking third place in the Public Speaking Competition, where he shared his story of struggle and triumph. Today, Jesse is proud to serve in the “the most feared and respected fighting force in the world,” he claims as a United States Marine. “I would not have been able to succeed had I not gone back to school and been involved with JMG.”



Jesse James Courville

Ernie and Jesse are merely two of the hundreds of success stories that JMG has witnessed in the last 16 years since its inception in high school classrooms throughout the state. At a time when high school dropout rates headline the news at both state and national



Ernie Flynn

levels, the Department of Labor and Industry's Jobs for Montana's Graduates program has been forging pathways of success, particularly in schools either on or bordering reservations, or serving urban American Indian students.

In school year 2004-2005, JMG served 62 underclass American Indian students and 71 seniors identified as having significant barriers to completing high school and continuing on to higher education or gainful employment. 100% of the senior students participating in JMG graduated (see data table).

"Reservation youth cannot apply for an after-school job at McDonald's because there isn't one," said enrolled Crow tribal member Reno Charette, Indian Affairs Coordinator for Governor Schweitzer. "JMG exposes students to a world of existing opportunities when all the data tells you opportunity doesn't exist on Montana's reservations. In this case, 71 families are impacted - knowing their relatives will move forward with a career that can potentially address the issues of poverty and unemployment on our reservations."

Performance Outcome	JAG	JMG Statewide Results	JMG On & Serving Reservation Schools
Graduation Rate	90%	96.10%	100.0%
Positive Outcome	80%	81.94%	83.10%
Non-Senior Return to School	70%	87.59%	91.23%

"Growing up on the reservation, I remember many of my former classmates had challenging home lives that made it difficult to perform to capacity at school," said Major Robinson, enrolled Northern Cheyenne tribal member and Economic Development Specialist in the Governor's Office of Economic Development. "Expectations for students to perform, without any comprehension of the cultural challenges we faced, led to several of my peers dropping out."

Former Culbertson JMG Specialist Sherry Savely agrees. "Many

of my Indian students are uncomfortable with eye contact, a firm handshake and interviewing," she said. "It delighted me to hear one of my seniors inform me that he got the job because he did what he learned in class. It may seem like a small step to some, but this was monumental to us."

JMG focuses efforts on students facing multiple barriers to graduation. "We recognize the plight that comes with economic disadvantage, low academic performance, excessive absences and lack of marketable occupational skills," said State Coordinator Drea Brown. "We place value and importance on the abilities each young person possesses and ultimately help them to discover the knowledge and tools they will need to create a successful future."

JMG's curriculum targets six core areas: Career Development, Job Attainment, Job Survival, Basic Math & Writing, Leadership & Development and Personal Skills including topics such as identifying value systems and decision making. This is accomplished through classroom work, job shadowing, career and interest assessments, mock interviews, and participation in the Montana Career Association. Through the Association, students who may not regularly engage in extracurricular activities are given the opportunity to hold offices and participate in leadership activities.

"We build portfolios, practice communication skills, conduct mock interviews, become resource seekers (rather than relying strictly on the Internet), and we learn that the best teamwork comes in the form of service work to others," said Savely.

Jobs for Montana Graduates (JMG) began in 1990 as a solution to the dropout rates experienced in Montana's high schools. Today, JMG supports a network of 41 programs offering 794 students the potential for future career development by focusing on staying in school and finding a career path suited to their interests and abilities. Most recently JMG was recognized by the National Jobs for America's Graduates for achieving "5 for 5" status in performance outcomes.

"As tribal people, we rely on and respect the visions of our ancestors. JMG provides our youth the opportunity to see the future and live their dreams," said Robinson. To learn more about the Jobs for Montana Graduates program contact Drea Brown at (406) 444-0978 or by visiting their website at <http://montana.jag.org>.

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